

In Search of Understanding the Primordial Human Nature (*Fitra*): *The Encounter of Islamic Theological, Philosophical, and Mystical Views, and Modern Science*

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Abstract of Thesis

In Search of Understanding the Primordial Human Nature (*Fitra*): *The Encounter of Islamic Theological, Philosophical, and Mystical Views, and Modern Science*

Fitra is a Quranic term used for primordial human nature which is further elaborated by the Prophetic traditions. Scholarly controversy exists in Islamic literature regarding the interpretation of sacred texts about *fitra* and its nature. This has led to an extremely challenging theological debate on predestination versus human free will. While the deterministic viewpoint endorses God's complete authority and attribute of omnipotence, the viewpoint of the presence of human free will emphasizes God's attribute of justice. Theologians have tried to reconcile both viewpoints trying to find a midway, however, the debate continues. Other scholars have tried to analyze whether human *fitra* is neutral, has a positive inclination toward God, or has a dual tendency toward both good and evil. Furthermore, Islamic philosophers and Sufi mystics have looked at the essence of the human being from a very different perspective in the great scheme of existence. On the other hand, science has so far denied the presence of human free will and has lacked convincing evidence that could prove any inherent knowledge of God that might be embedded within human nature. I will discuss that Islamic sacred texts and scholarly discussions support that primordial human nature has been familiarized with the Divine presence and has a persistent longing to meet Him.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Understanding human nature is a very complicated subject. It can be approached either from the perspective of material and social sciences or from the perspective of religious and metaphysical doctrines. The theological challenge to explain the ontology of evil in presence of an ‘All-Good’ Divine Being has long been discussed in theodicy debates. Various theological and philosophical arguments exist explaining the presence of evil and human tendencies towards it. Between the good and evil forces, we observe man struggling all his life, sometimes standing upright and other times stumbling. There has been extensive scientific research regarding human behavioral, psychological, and moral developments to determine what controls human decision-making capacity and behavior, especially with regard to choosing between good and evil. However, the controversy still exists whether an innate or primordial human nature exists and if so, does it have a tendency towards good or evil. Additionally, the question remains why human souls have historically found solace in the concept of the existence of a Divine Being.

To answer the question of whether Islamic scholarly and metaphysical understanding of primordial human nature can shed light beyond the scientific theories, we start with a Prophetic tradition narrated by the Companion Abu Hurayra (d. 58/678) about human *fiṭra*:

“Every child is born with the *fiṭra* (*ma min mawludin yuladu illa ‘ala al-fiṭrati*); it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or *Majus*, the same way as animals give birth to non-mutilated cubs. Do you think that they are mutilated before you mutilate their noses? [The Companions said]: Oh, Messenger of

God, what do you think about those of them who die young? He said: God knows what they would have done [had they lived].”¹

This Prophetic tradition (which will be subsequently called the *fitra* hadith) has various versions in which the term *fitra* is mentioned. It is said to be a reference to an elaboration of the Quranic verse 30:30 (which will be subsequently called the *fitra* verse) which also mentions the word *fitra* in reference to God creating human beings on His *fitra*:

*“So set thy face to the religion, a man of pure faith- the fītra of God with which He created humankind. There is no changing God’s creation (la tabdila li-khalqi Allah). That is the right religion, but most men know it not- turning to Him.” (30:30)*²

The Islamic concept of primordial human nature (*fitra* – this term will be used in the text to represent primordial human nature) is rooted in the thought that every human being is born with a certain nature that is an innate part of the human soul –primordial human nature. Although man is affected to a great extent by environmental factors, his *fitra* remains an integral part of the conscience inside him that influences his decision-making faculties. In light of the above hadith and Quranic verse, *fitra* is usually understood as the natural or divine makeup with which a child is born.

Before going into the discussion about ambiguities and controversies that revolve around the understanding of *fitra*, it is important to understand the word in its

¹ Muslim Ibn al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri. *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. ([Bayrut]: Dar Ihya’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah, 1955), *Kitab al-Qadr. Bab ma’na kullu mawludin yiiladu ‘ala’l-fītrah*, Hadith 2658 [This book will be subsequently called *Saḥīḥ Muslim*]; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Shifa’ al-‘alil fi masa’il al-qaḍa’ wa-al-qadar wa-al-ḥikma wa-al-ta’lil*, eds. al-Sayyid Muḥammad al-Sayyid and Sa’id Maḥmūd (Cairo: Dar al-Ḥadith, 1994), 607 [This book will be subsequently called *Shifa’* (1994)]

² The Quran (30:30). *Al-Rum. فَاقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ* Translation from A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964). The phrase “*la tabdila li-khalqi Allah*” has also been taken by some as a prohibition and translated as “Do not change God’s creation”. Both Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya reject this alternative reading. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar’ ta’aruḍ al-‘aql wa-al-naql aw muwafaqat ṣaḥīḥ al-manqul li-ṣariḥ al-ma’qul*, edited by ‘Abd al-Laṭīf ‘Abd al-Raḥman (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1997), 8:425 [will be subsequently called *Dar’* (Beirut)]; *Shifa’* (1994), 630; Here the term *Tabdil* is used as an adjective not verb. So, translating it as “do not change” is wrong.

grammatical sense and its usage in the Quran and hadith. The word *fitra* is derived from the Arabic root word which is a verb in its first form '*fatara*' meaning slit, split or crack but is also used to mean to create or complete something in the pure form without any ill will.³ One of God's names '*al-Fatir*' is also derived from it meaning the originator as used in the Quran –

“Al hamdu lillahi Fatir us samawati wa al ardh”

*“All praise is for Allah, the Originator of the heavens
and the earth” (35:1).*

The 7th Arabic verb form of the root word is *infatara* which denotes splitting or slitting as used in the Quranic verse –

“idha's sama'un fatarat”

“When the heaven shall be cleft” (Quran: 82:1)

Or the 5th verb form *tafattara* meaning the same –

“Takadu's Samawatu yatafattarna minhu”

“The heavens almost rupture therefrom (Quran: 19:90).”

Most scholars have interpreted the above *fitra* hadith and the Quranic verse to mean that within human nature, there is an inherent divine spiritual knowledge or awareness that naturally facilitates human beings to realize that 'Islam' in its sense of submission and surrendering to God is the correct way of life.⁴ Since the religion of Islam is a natural religion (*Din al fitra*), this primordial human tendency must attract men towards the religion of Islam and make them inclined to accept it.

³ Ali Muhammad Bhat, “Human psychology (*fitrah*) from an Islamic perspective.” *International Journal of Nusantara Islam*, (2016) 4(2), 61-74.

⁴ Islam in addition to being the name of the religion, also means submission to God as the higher power – as according to Islamic understanding all the previous Prophets brought the same religion – Islam.

However, there has been a difference of opinion between the classic orthodox Sunni Islamic scholars in the interpretation of *fitra*. Although in the early Islamic period around the 8th century, a strictly deterministic view of the *fitra* was present among many scholars⁵ which held that the human *fitra*, human actions, and fate are all predetermined by God and each human being is bound to act by it. Because of several philosophical and theological loopholes in it, this view was mostly rejected by later scholars in favor of the view where some degree of human freedom of choice is present to justify the human reward and punishment as a part of God's justice. Outside the deterministic view, we mainly see three different types of interpretations based on the extent by which both the good and the evil are represented as an innate feature in human *fitra* as opposed to the environmental influences secondary to individual circumstances.⁶

The most prevalent view among these is called the 'positive view' of human nature which means that human beings are inherently good-natured and that evil acts as an external agent to misguide us. The second view is termed the 'dual view' meaning that man has both good and evil innate tendencies as part of his *fitra*. The third view is called the 'neutral view' which interprets that the human *fitra* is ignorant and innocent and does not have any innate tendencies towards good or evil and that good and evil are both external agents from the environment that influence our personalities and decision-making.

⁵These views involve the schools of Jabarites and Qadarites. See Harry.A. Wolfson. *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 602.

⁶ Mohamed Yasien. "The Interpretations of Fitrah." *Islamic Studies* 34, no. 2 (1995), 129-130.

In contrast, in the realms of material and social sciences, human nature, its tendencies, and behaviors are studied purely through a secular lens in various disciplines such as neuroscience, genetics, developmental psychology, behavioral and cultural sciences, etc., totally cut off from the possibilities of any metaphysical associations. Charles Darwin turned the old principle of continuity into a dynamic one and his theory of descent with modification through variation and natural selection⁷, and survival of the fittest changed the paradigm of human thought for coming generations. The revolutionary nature of his solution without the need for any metaphysical assumptions took out the need for the Creator or an intelligent design from his dogma, or even the need for Aristotle's final causes and goal-directed forces in nature.⁸ Darwin characterizes the human being as the only species which possesses a complex moral sense. Although he believes in the presence of some moral roots in animal history, Darwin does not claim that humans' moral sense can be reduced to animals' social instincts. Alfred Russel Wallace in his paper writes of a certain stage of human evolution when, along with changes in the brain, the "human faculties" such as human speech, social, moral, and intellectual faculties might have evolved and become permanent.⁹

Additionally, we see numerous scientific studies from various fields such as neuroscience, psychology, behavioral science, and genetics that try to explain human behavior and postulate various theories suggesting why human beings behave in certain

⁷ This is the complete term of Darwin's theory which he uses in the 6th edition of *Origin of Species* (1876). Charles Darwin. *The works of Charles Darwin, Volume 16: The origin of species, 1876*. NYU Press, 1989.

⁸ The first edition of *Descent of Man* was published in 1871, Charles Darwin, *The descent of man (1871)*. Greenwood Press. A second augmented and corrected edition in 1874. A revised and augmented edition of 1874 was published in 1877.

⁹ Alfred Wallace, "The Origin of Human Races and the Antiquity of Man Deduced from the Theory of "Natural Selection." *Journal of the Anthropological Society of London* 2 (1864): clviii – clxx

ways. Studies are also focused on why human beings have certain belief systems and if those can be altered by chemical or structural changes in the brain.

Finally, there are a number of philosophers, metaphysicians, and travelers of the metaphysical world who have attempted to develop a metaphysical science that deals with questions that are beyond the realms of natural sciences. Some of these answers are based on traditional philosophies while others are based on experiential knowledge or the ‘knowledge by presence’ which has been formulated through the experience of individuals throughout human history who were able to have a spiritual journey deep into their inner selves and gained first-hand knowledge directly from the inner sources. This can also be called ‘witnessing knowledge by presence’ or *shuhud*. These people were able to have a first-hand experience of human nature, its various components, and its connections and relationships to other realities. They belong to various forms of mystical schools including Islamic mysticism or Sufism where experiential knowledge has unveiled certain metaphysical mysteries which has helped individuals in understanding various layers of ‘being’ and their relationship with the Supreme Being.

In this study, I intend to analyze the understanding of primordial human nature (*fitra*) as described in Islamic sacred traditions and how various Islamic scholars, classic as well as modern, have differed in their understanding of human *fitra*. I will elaborate on the problems and ambiguities that still exist in scholarly understanding. I will also discuss the secular and purely scientific perspective of the understanding of human nature as to where science currently stands in its understanding. Finally, I will bring in the perspectives of the thinkers in the field of metaphysics with special attention to Islamic philosophy and mysticism to see if that can help enhance our understanding of human

fitra. Through this study, I expect to conclude that knowledge of God is inherently present within the human *fitra*. I will try to explain how *fitra* may relate to our beliefs and translate into our actions, and how it may act as a magnetic force that provides a spiritual pull toward its place of origin – The Divine.

Chapter 2: The Traditional Islamic Controversies in the Understanding of *Fitra*

Islamic specialists of *kalam* (*mutakallemun*) dealt with basic questions such as: Does God create human actions? How much choice (*ikhtiyar*) do human beings have to perform their actions? What is God's foreknowledge about human actions? How do we explain God's complete authority in the presence of some human authority? How do we reconcile human choice with the ultimate will of God?

As discussed above, some early scholars had a deterministic view about *fitra*, however, most of the later Islamic scholars have had a view in favor of human beings having some freedom of choice and hence being responsible for their actions. Mu'tazila was the first rationalist group which questioned the deterministic dogma and proposed the presence of human choice to satisfy God's attribute of divine justice (*al-'adl*). They believed human beings have free will and are hence, the sole creators of their actions.¹⁰ Subsequently, Ash'rites opposing the Mu'tazila dogma of complete free will tried to find a midway in an attempt to defend their predecessors' (*Salafis*) deterministic views but kept an element of human choice in their theory called 'Acquisition' (*kasb*) theory. Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 324/935) and later Ash'arite theologians attempted to reconcile the highly deterministic and even fatalistic Hadith material with the religious conviction of human moral responsibility to justify the divine reward and punishment. Despite the fact that Ash'rites used arguments and a theory similar to Mu'tazila, they derived opposite conclusions.

¹⁰ Livnat Holtzman, "Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the *Fitra* Tradition: The Use of Hadith in Theological Treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya." *Ibn Taymiyya and his times* (2010), 163-88; For an analysis of the content of Hadith material on *qadar*, also see W. M. Watt, "Predestination in Early Islam" (London: Luzac and Company, 1948)

2.1. Deterministic view of human actions:

Throughout Islamic history, scholars have struggled with the paradox of determinism vs. free will on how much freedom human beings have to act freely within the world that is run under the will of God. The issue had been called in Islamic philosophy as *al-qada' wa al-qadar*, literally meaning “the decree and the measure”. Most scholars formed their opinions based on the interpretation of the Quranic verses and the Prophetic traditions. There are several Quranic verses that were interpreted to mean that everything happens according to the will of God including human thoughts, intentions, and actions. This idea started from the very concept of the ‘Preserved Tablet’ (*al-Lawh al-Mahfuz*) where everything including the Quran is already written.¹¹ God calls himself ‘The Knower of the seen and unseen’ (*Alim al-ghayb wa al-shahada*)¹², where unseen includes His knowledge about all things to happen. Before the middle of the 8th century, many scholars used to have a deterministic view (Jabarites or *jabariah*).¹³ Scholars like Abd Allah Ibn Mubarak (d. 797), were adherents of this view and believed that similar to the fact that God created the laws of nature, he also created human actions including good and evil deeds as well as human fate, all of which are predetermined in God’s will. Ibn Mubarak’s interpretation of *fitra* was decisive in terms that each individual by the divine decree is either good or evil by nature. Thus, irrespective of the presence of external agents of guidance or misguidance, the individual is absolutely bound by God’s will to live the life that has already been prescribed in His will. This opinion was based on several Quranic verses (especially 76:30, 81:29) suggesting that

¹¹ The Quran (85:21-22), *al-Buruj*. Eng. Transl. Sahih International. بَلْ هُوَ قُرْءَانٌ مَّجِيدٌ - فِي لَوْحٍ مَّحْفُوظٍ

¹² The Quran (59:22), *al-Hashr*. Sahih International. هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عِلْمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

¹³ Harry A. Wolfson. *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (London: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 602.

human will (so-called free will) is also subordinate to God's will. This opinion became further strengthened by several deterministic Prophetic traditions that were interpreted by several Companions and their followers as deterministic in matters of human actions and fate. There are several Quranic verses where complete divine authority is presented in a way that may be taken by some as predetermination. Some verses that indicate God's will, knowledge, and complete authority in everything that happens or will happen are as follows:

"Are you [Prophet] not aware that God knows all that is in the heavens and earth? All this is written in a Record; this is easy for God." (22:70)¹⁴

"It is He who has control over the heavens and earth and has no of spring—no one shares control with Him—and Who created all things and made them to an exact measure." (25:2)¹⁵

"Then Allah leaves whoever He wills to stray and guides whoever He wills. And He is the Almighty, All-Wise." (14:4)¹⁶

"And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed - all of them entirely. Then, [O Muḥammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?" (10:99)¹⁷

"And it is not for anyone to believe except by permission of Allah" (10:100)¹⁸

"And you do not will except that Allah wills - Lord of the worlds." (81:29)¹⁹

"And you do not will except that Allah wills. Indeed, Allah is ever Knowing and Wise." (76:30)²⁰

"Then whoever wills will remember it. But they cannot do so unless Allah wills. He alone is worthy to be feared and entitled to forgive." (74:55-56)²¹

¹⁴ The Quran (22:70), *al-Hajj*. Sahih International. أَلَمْ تَعْلَمْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ فِي كِتَابٍ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ

¹⁵ The Quran (25:2), *al-Furqān*. Sahih International. أَلَذِي لَهُ مَلَكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ شَرِيكٌ فِي الْمُلْكِ وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَقَدَرَهُ تَقْدِيرًا

¹⁶ The Quran (14:4), *Ibrahim*. Sahih International. فَيُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

¹⁷ The Quran (10:99), *Yunus*. Sahih International. وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مَن فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ

¹⁸ The Quran (10:100), *Yunus*. Sahih International. وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تُؤْمِنَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ

¹⁹ The Quran (81:29), *al-Takwir*. Sahih International. وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

²⁰ The Quran (76:30), *al-Insan*. Sahih International. وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا

²¹ The Quran (74:55-56), *al-Mudassir*. Sahih International. فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ - وَمَا يَذْكُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ هُوَ أَهْلُ الْقُوَى وَأَهْلُ الْغَفَرَةِ

“When it is Allah Who created you and whatever you do.”
(37:96)²²

“No disaster strikes upon the earth or among yourselves except that it is in a register before We bring it into being - indeed that, for Allah, is easy.” (57:22)²³

“He has guided some, while others are destined to stray. They have taken devils as their masters instead of Allah—thinking they are [rightly] guided.” (7:30)²⁴

“So, whoever Allah wants to guide - He expands his breast to [contain] Islam; and whoever He wants to send astray - He makes his breast tight and constricted as though he were climbing into the sky. Thus does Allah place defilement upon those who do not believe.” (6:125)²⁵

Additionally, there are several Prophetic traditions that have been quoted to support the idea of predetermination. Some of these are outlined as under:

*“The creation of each one of you is in his mother’s womb for forty days or nights, then as a clot for a similar period, then as a piece of flesh for a similar period, then the angel is sent to it to announce four decrees. He writes his provision, his life span, his deeds, and whether he is blessed or damned. Then, he breathes the soul into it. Verily, one of you acts with the deeds of the people of Paradise until he is not but an arm’s length away from it, yet the decree overtakes him, he acts with the deeds of the people of Hellfire and thus enters Hellfire. And one of you acts with the deeds of the people of Hellfire until he is not but an arm’s length away from it, yet the decree overtakes him, he acts with the deeds of the people of Paradise and thus enters it.”*²⁶

*“Verily, Allah Almighty created His creation in darkness and He cast over them His light. Whoever is touched by that light is guided, and whoever misses it is astray. Thus, I say the pens have been dried upon the knowledge of Allah.”*²⁷

“...Know that if the nations gather together to benefit you, they will not benefit you unless Allah has decreed it for you. And if

²² The Quran (37:96), *As-Saffat*. Sahih International. وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

²³ The Quran (57:22), *al-Hadid*. Sahih International. مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا ۚ إِنَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ

²⁴ The Quran. (7:30), *al-A'raf*. Sahih International. فَرِيقًا هَدَىٰ وَفَرِيقًا حَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ الضَّلَالَةُ ۚ إِنَّهُمْ اتَّخَذُوا الشَّيَاطِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۚ وَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ مُّهْتَدُونَ

²⁵ The Quran. (6:125), *al-An'am*. Sahih International. فَمَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ ۖ وَمَنْ يُرِدْ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُ يَجْعَلْ صَدْرَهُ ضَيِّقًا ۚ

²⁶ Muhammad Ibn Ismail al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*. (Bayrut: Dar Tawq al-Najjah, 2002), 9:135 #7454; [This book will be subsequently called *Sahih al-Bukhari*]; *Sahih Muslim*, 4:2036 #2643.

²⁷ Muhammad al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*. (Bayrut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1998), 4:323 #2642 [This book will be subsequently called *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*]

the nations gather together to harm you, they will not harm you unless Allah has decreed it for you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried.”²⁸

Even for the *fitra* hadith narrated at the beginning of the paper, there is another version that has been quoted by various scholars. This version of the *fitra* tradition opens with the phrase:

“Every child is born...” but continues with the variation “...and on his neck, there is a piece of paper which says whether he is miserable or happy.”²⁹

The first few generations of Muslims after the Prophet, the predecessors (*Salaf*)³⁰ had a deterministic view due to the way these verses and Prophetic traditions were interpreted. Abu Hurayra who is the immediate transmitter of the *fitra* tradition interpreted this tradition along with the Quranic *fitra* verse 30:30 in a manner that assumes humankind was divided into two groups at the time of creation – believers and unbelievers. Accordingly, Abu Hurayra postulates that faith and unbelief do not depend on divine guidance or leading astray, and certainly not on human choice, but that they are both the *fitra* with which humans are created. This was further endorsed by the tradition attributed to Aisha who said:

“A child of the *anṣar*, whose parents were Muslims, has died. I said: ‘How happy he is, [being] one of the birds of Paradise!’ For that, the Messenger of God replied: ‘Do you not know that God

²⁸ *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, 4:248 #2516.

²⁹ Meaning if he will be an inhabitant of the hellfire or paradise. *Shifāʾ* (1994), 56.

³⁰ *Salaf* (Arabic: سلف, "ancestors" or "predecessors"), also often referred to with the honorific expression of "*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*" (السلف الصالح), the pious predecessors, are often taken to be the first three generations of Muslims – Companions (*Sahaba*), the followers (*tabiʿun*) and followers of the followers (*tabʿa tabiʿun*).

created Paradise and its dwellers, and created Hell and its dwellers?”³¹

This also conveys the message that faith and unbelief are implanted in humankind at its creation. Based on these and many other similar verses and traditions, the Jabarites made an extremely strict viewpoint that it is only God who gives us faith and who makes us perform the acts of worship and every action is done under God’s predetermined will. Hence, every child is created with his predetermined destiny between the dichotomy of paradise versus hell. Before the start of the ninth century, another school of thought Qadarites (*Qadariyah*) came into being in response to the Jabarites (*Jabariah*) challenging their deterministic views. Subsequent scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) have also recognized these differences in the interpretation of *fitra* that existed among earlier scholars in this determinism-freedom paradigm.³²

Non-deterministic scholarly views favoring human choice:

2.2. The Mu‘tazilite versus Ash‘arite dogmas:

Since the deterministic view believed in God’s complete omnipotence and viewed human actions to be created by God as well, it faced the issue of God’s justice in punishing human beings for those actions. As discussed above, Mu‘tazila was the first group who questioned the deterministic belief and held human beings having free will. The Mu‘tazila reconciled God’s omnipotence and man’s responsibility by affirming man’s capability, granted to him by God, of creating his own actions. Mu‘tazilites asserted that if God were to create a man’s unbelief while commanding him to believe,

³¹ *Dar’* (Beirut), 4:304; *Shifa’* (1994), 628–629; The tradition has several versions. See Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi (d. 676/1277), *Muslim bi-Sharh al-Nawawi*, ed. Muḥammad Fu‘ad ‘Abd al-Baqi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1421/2000), 16, 173.

³² Shihab al-Din ibn Hajar al-Asqalani. *Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari* (Beirut: Dar al Ma‘rifah. n 1300), vol. III, p. 199; Referenced from Yasien Muhamed. *The Interpretations of Fiṭrah* (1995).

He would be unjust in punishing man for his unbelief. Thus, the Mu'tazilites tried to save the attribute of God's justice by upholding man's responsibility for his own actions.³³

Mu'tazila considered human intellect capable of differentiating between good and evil, hence, religion is not necessary to make this differentiation.³⁴ They initially faced a lot of criticism for challenging the faith of the *Salaf* in the concept of God's omnipotence. Abu Ya'la (Ibn al-Farra', d. 458/1066), a Hanbali scholar whose work is based on the assumptions and methods of the classical *kalam*, was one of the harshest critics of Mu'tazila.

However, since the Mu'tazila tried to resolve the issue of God's justice in their doctrine and focused on human reasoning and rationality being capable of differentiating between good and evil, their views received some scholarly acceptance and penetrated the political elite of their time as well. Some of the Ash'arite scholars such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi agreed with the Mu'tazila's view of the human intellect having knowledge of good and evil.³⁵ Fakhr al-Din al-Razi said:

“Human reason knows some things as suitable for our soul, and some of them in contrary to it. We do not disagree with al-Mu'tazila in this regard. Since the pleasure and what leads to it is suitable, and the pain (suffering) and what leads to it is contradistinction to our nature. Furthermore, there is no need to know this suitability and disharmony from the Shariah. Moreover, we know with our reasons that, knowledge is perfection, and ignorance is a defect.”³⁶

³³ Javad Fakhkhar Toosi, “The Asha'ri Theological School and the Authority of Human Reason in Ethics.” *ICR Journal* 11, no. 1 (2020): p. 112

³⁴ Mas'ud ibn 'Umar al-Taftazani, *Sharh al-Maqasid* (Qom: Sharif Razi Publishing House, 1988), 2, 282.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 282.

³⁶ M. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *al-Arba'in fi Usul al-Din* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Azhariyyah, 1986), 346.

The Ash‘arite scholars however considered the Mu‘tazilite doctrine problematic since, in their view, it jeopardized the concept of God’s omnipotence. For Ash‘arites, God is the sole Creator who creates human actions as well. In order to safeguard God’s omnipotence as well as man’s responsibility, Abu al-Hasan al-Ash‘ari developed a theory of Acquisition (*kasb* theory) according to which God creates man’s actions while man appropriates them and thus becomes responsible for them. The Ash‘arite scholar Qadi ‘Ad al-Din al-‘Iji, in his book *al-Mawaqif fi ‘ilm al-kalam*, explained the *kasb* theory that was proposed by al-Ash‘ari:

“The acts of men come only with the power of God, and human power does not have an effect on the realization of those things. God creates the power and the will in man, which, if there is no obstacle, God, at the same time as human power and will, creates the act. Therefore, what a man does, is God’s creation and is acquired by man. The meaning of the theory of ‘Gain’ (*al-kasb*) is that, the act will be done simultaneously as human power and will, but human power and will, have no effect on the emergence of the act. This is the theory of Sheykh Abu al-Hasan al-Ash‘ari.”³⁷

The Mu‘tazilites and the Ash‘arites both incorporated in their doctrines an element of human choice either in the form of free will or *kasb*, hence enabling Divine justice to play a role in the final reward and punishment.

The scholarly views about human beings having a choice are also based on numerous Quranic verses indicating human freedom to choose between good and bad, and their reward and punishment based on their actions. Following are some verses from the Quran that emphasize human beings being responsible for their actions:

³⁷ Javad Fakhkhar Toosi, “The Ashari Theological School and the Authority of Human Reason in Ethics.” *ICR Journal* 11, no. 1 (2020), 117

“There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become distinct from the wrong.” (2:256)³⁸

“Do whatever you want. He is certainly All-Seeing of what you do” (41:40)³⁹

“And say, [O Prophet,] “‘This is’ the truth from your Lord. Whoever wills let them believe, and whoever wills let them disbelieve” (18:29)⁴⁰

“Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful” (76:3)⁴¹

“And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed - all of them entirely. Then, [O Muhammad], would you compel the people in order that they become believers?” (10:99)⁴²

“Whatever affliction befalls you is because of what your own hands have committed” (42:30)⁴³

“Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves” (13:11)⁴⁴

“That is because Allah would not change a favor which He had bestowed upon a people until they change what is within themselves” (8:53)⁴⁵

“Otherwise, he who wrongs, then substitutes good after evil - indeed, I am Forgiving and Merciful.” (27:11)⁴⁶

“He misleads many thereby and guides many thereby. And He misleads not except the defiantly disobedient.” (2:26)⁴⁷

After the Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite doctrines, most later scholars believed in presence of an element of human choice for their actions and the strict deterministic view became a rarity.

2.3. Scholars rejecting Jabarite and Ash'arite theories:

³⁸ The Quran (2:256), *al-Baqarah*. Sahih International. لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ

³⁹ The Quran (41:40) *Fusilat*. Sahih International. أَعْمَلُوا مَا شِئْتُمْ إِنَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

⁴⁰ The Quran (18:29) *al-Kahf*. Sahih International. وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ

⁴¹ The Quran (76:3), *al-Insan*. Sahih International. إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا

⁴² The Quran (10:99), *Yunus*. Sahih International. وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مِنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرَهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ

⁴³ The Quran (42:30), *al-Shura*. Sahih International. وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِيمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ

⁴⁴ The Quran (13:11), *al-Ra'd*. Sahih International. إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

⁴⁵ The Quran (8:53), *Anfal*. Sahih International. ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَمْ يَكْ مُغَيِّرًا نِعْمَةً أَنْعَمَهَا عَلَى قَوْمٍ حَتَّى يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ

⁴⁶ The Quran. (27:11), *al-Namal*. Sahih International. إِلَّا مَنْ ظَلَمَ ثُمَّ بَدَّلْ حَسَنًا بَعْدَ سَوْءٍ فَأَتَى غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

⁴⁷ The Quran. (2:26), *al-Baqarah*. Sahih International. يُضِلُّ بِهٖ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهٖ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهٖ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ

Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) and Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) defended the traditional interpretation of *qadr* like Ash‘rites but with several modifications. Ibn Taymiyyah, although influenced by the Ash‘rite scholar Fakhr al-Din Razi (d. 604/1209),⁴⁸ formed their theory regarding the nature and range of human choice. Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim, both formulated their doctrines based on the same deterministic hadith material but rejected the *kasb* solution that was formulated by Ash‘rites, and endorsed the presence of free will. They reinterpreted the fatalistic sacred texts and understood those as a command for the believers to take their fate into their own hands and take the responsibility for their actions. Ibn Taymiyyah discussed this matter in detail in his treatise *Dar’ ta’arud al-‘aql wa-al-naql* (On Preventing Contradiction between Reason and Revelation) while Ibn al-Qayyim expanded on that in his treatise *Shifa’ al-‘alil fi masa’il al-qada’ wa-al-qadar wa-al-hikma wa-al-ta’lil* (Healing the Person with Wrong Concepts about Predetermination and Causality and the Knowledge and the Explanation – henceforth called, *Shifa’ al-‘alil*). Ibn Taymiyyah used the *fitra* hadith to assert the existence of human free will in matters of belief and unbelief (*al-huda wa al-dalal*). Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya not only endorsed his teacher’s views but further refined them. Ibn Taymiyyah first tried to define *fitra* under the context of the *fitra* hadith material and the Quranic verses. He explored if *fitra* meant the human tendency towards monotheism or the predetermined happiness or misery destined for human beings (as seen in the above second version of the *fitra* hadith). He also discussed in *dar al-ta’rud*, the exegetical controversies that had existed among the previous traditionists regarding *fitra* – should it be considered as a human tendency towards

⁴⁸ The influence of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi on Ibn Taymiyya is well demonstrated in several writings.

monotheism in general or the religion of Islam in particular?⁴⁹ Being a Hanbalite scholar, he refers to Ahmad Ibn Hanbal's views about *fitra* who had discussed two interpretations of *fitra*. According to the first interpretation, *fitra* is recognizing the existence of God while according to the second, *fitra* is the creation of the fetus in the mother's womb in such a way that through the primordial pact, his *fitra* leads him to Islam.⁵⁰ For Ibn Taymiyyah, *fitra* was equal to Islam. He also examined the other opinion that is attributed to Ibn Hanbal according to which *fitra* equals happiness and misery as well. Ibn Taymiyyah tried to save Ibn Hanbal from being labeled as having contradictory views in his deterministic statement about *fitra* being predetermined destination in hellfire or paradise. To establish that, Ibn Taymiyyah brought in the theory of God's foreknowledge about things and reconciled Ibn Hanbal's statement by saying that God only ordained misery or happiness *after* predetermination through His foreknowledge that the child will resort to belief or unbelief through environmental means or *asbab* (such as an act of their parents). Hence, the conversion of the child to other religions has been predetermined (pre-known) by God through His foreknowledge and is the reason for the *fitra* of his misery or happiness.⁵¹ He explains misery as the life of the apostasy and happiness as a conviction to Islam. In his theological formulations of *fitra* mentioned in the hadith, he explains "Every child is born with what is known according to God's foreknowledge of what he is going to become." Hence, in the pre-determined *fitra*, he connects it directly to God's foreknowledge (*'ilm Allah*). Consequently, he moves away from the pure deterministic view where fate is ordained through God's compulsion toward a view

⁴⁹ *Dar'* (Beirut), 4:277–279

⁵⁰ *Shifa'* (1994), 607–608; *Dar'* (Beirut), 4: 277–278

⁵¹ *Shifa'* (1994), 609; 284 *Dar'* (Beirut), 4:279

allowing human choice where they may get influenced by circumstantial conditions (*asbab*) despite being on *fitra* (a natural inclination to believe in God) but they are destined at birth only through God's foreknowledge (*'ilm*) of their future acts that will lead to happiness or misery. He summarized his views as:

“The consensus (*ijma'*) and traditions (*al-athar*) transmitted by the *salaf* only prove the following idea, to which we gave preference: human beings [are created] with *fitra*, and they meet happiness and misery which were ordained according to God's foreknowledge That does not indicate that they are without a complete *fitra* at birth, [a *fitra*] which would have led to the belief, were it not for the obstacle (that is, the conversion of newborns to Judaism and Christianity by their parents).”⁵²

2.4. Further discussion about the conflict:

The scholarly conflicts between determinism and human choice discussed in detail above are mainly due to different exegetical frameworks used under the Quranic concept of *al-huda wa al-dalal*. The first framework is for example, according to the Quranic verse:

“Thereby He leads many astray, and thereby He guides many, and thereby He leads none astray save the ungodly.” (2:26)⁵³

According to this framework, prior human choices and actions determine subsequent guidance or misguidance from God and God only leads one astray because of one's wrong previous acts. This framework is used by most scholars who believe in the element of human choice and responsibility for their actions. The second framework of *al-qadr* is more deterministic and is for example interpreted through the Quranic verse:

⁵² *Shifa'* (1994), 625; *Dar'* (Beirut), 4:302

⁵³ The Quran (2:26), *al-Baqarah*. Sahih International. يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا ۚ وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا الْفَاسِقِينَ

“Whomsoever God desires to guide, He expands his breast to Islam; whomsoever He desires to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow, tight.” (6:125)⁵⁴

This framework is mostly utilized by the determinist scholars who use this and similar other verses in connection with many *qadr* traditions according to which humankind was divided into two groups – people of paradise and people of hell, prior to their creation before they have any chance to perform good or bad deeds. The Companion Umar ibn Khattab (d. 23/644) narrated a Prophetic tradition in connection with the explanation of the following Quranic verse:

“And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, ‘Am I not your Lord? They said, ‘Yes, we testify’” (7:172)

Umar said that when the Prophet was asked about this verse, he said that this event happened after the creation of Adam. The Prophet further explained:

“When God created Adam, He rubbed his [Adam’s] back with His right hand and pulled out his offspring. And then He said: I have created these for Paradise. Then He rubbed his back again and pulled out his offspring. And then He said: I have created these for Hell.”⁵⁵

In this *qadr* framework, there are two parallel lines of human creation destined for paradise and hell.

Mu‘tazilite scholars dealt with the issue of *al-huda wa al-dalal* stressing God’s justice.

They emphasized that God’s action of leading them astray is the result of their apostasy

⁵⁴ The Quran (6:125). *al-An’am*. Sahih International. *فَمَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ أَنْ يَهْدِيَهُ يَشْرَحْ صَدْرَهُ لِلْإِسْلَامِ وَمَنْ يُرِدْ أَنْ يُضِلَّهُ يَجْعَلْ صَدْرَهُ ضَيِّقًا حَرَجًا*

⁵⁵ The Hadith interprets the event described in Q 7: 172 as a one-time event, which took place during the creation of Adam. Ibn Kathir relates the *fiṭra* tradition to Q 7:172. See Ibn Kathir’s, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Azim*.

and not the cause of it. Furthermore, some Mu‘tazilites believed that the seal of the heart by God should also be understood as an expression of God’s declaration of them being apostates rather than an act to prevent them from believing.⁵⁶ Abu Ya‘la (d. 458/1066), a Hanbali scholar, harshly criticized Mu‘tazila’s views and assumptions and said:

“God leads astray and guides. His leading astray the apostates mean creating the apostasy, the deviation, and the acts of disobedience in them [the apostates], as well as [creating] the ability to perform the above in them. Guiding the believers means foreordaining faith in their hearts, as well as the ability [to believe], and granting them the ability to successfully perform the acts of obedience. God’s guidance indeed can be an appeal addressed to the one, whom God guides, to believe. It can be [an appeal] to obey, addressed to he, who knows how to accept this appeal and obey it.”

Ibn Taymiyyah, on the other hand, used the *fitra* tradition to support human choice in *al-huda wa al-dalal*. Unlike most other *qadr* traditions, the *fitra* tradition may not be considered totally unidirectional. The tradition has two aspects, the first one being somewhat deterministic in which the initial variables are fixed and every child is born on *fitra* of Islam. However, the second aspect appears non-deterministic opening up the possibilities of other environmental factors such as the child’s parents that may influence him to change his faith to other faiths.

Ibn Taymiyyah considers the rigid deterministic interpretation of *qadr* traditions by the *salaf* as misguided and explains that the *salaf* most likely took this rigid position in response to Mu‘tazila’s interpretation of human free will in the negation of predetermination. He believes that the Quranic verse 7:172 (the verse of the primordial covenant) and the above-mentioned tradition by Umar Ibn Khattab are unrelated. He tries

⁵⁶ Abu al-Hasan al-Ash‘ari, *Kitab maqalat al-islamiyyin wa-ikhtilaf al-mu‘allin*, ed. H. Ritter, 2nd edition (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1963), 259.

to give the *salaf*, a benefit of the doubt and comments on their interpretation of *fitra* in the following way:

“As for what they (the *salaf*) have said that God created them [humankind] with unbelief, faith, recognition [of His existence] and denial [of it]. If what they meant was, that God knew beforehand and predetermined that they will believe or not, recognize Him or deny Him, and that all exists through the will of God, His predetermination and creation, then that is the truth, which the Mu‘tazila deny, since the exaggerators amongst them deny the existence of divine knowledge, and all of them deny His creation, will and omnipotence altogether. But if they [the *salaf*] meant, that the recognition [of God] and the denial [of God] existed while the covenant was made, then there are two [possibilities] regarding this [interpretation]: the first one is that during that time, their knowledge [of God] and belief existed in them [humankind], and this is what many of the *salaf* say.... This does not contradict what is said in the Hadith, that he [the child] is born with a religion, and that God has created His creation as monotheists (*hunaifa*). Moreover, it corroborates it. As of the view that while acknowledging [the existence of God], they [humankind] were actually divided into obedient and reluctant (*ta’i’ wa karih*), then according to my knowledge, there is no report about it, which was transmitted by any of the *salaf*.”⁵⁷

He harshly criticizes the interpretation of al-Suddi (d. 127/745) for his incorrect assertion.⁵⁸ He asserts that God’s foreknowledge is not causal and should not be taken as God’s compulsion for belief or unbelief. He proves his point of human choice by referring to the Quranic verse:

“...save him who has done evil, then, after evil, has changed into good” (37:11)

Hence, Ibn Taymiyyah explains his dogma by dividing God’s will into two parts – religious (or prescriptive) will and creative will. His religious will encompasses His commands and prohibitions which human beings can choose to obey or disobey. His

⁵⁷ *Dar’* (Beirut), 4:307; *Shifa’* (1994), 629

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 294

creative will, on the other hand, encompasses His foreknowledge about human actions by which He predetermines who will be going to paradise versus hell.⁵⁹ Ibn Taymiyyah compares human *fitra* to milk for which a newborn yearns because it is beneficial for his body and growth. God creates these instincts in the newborn to protect him from potential harm. However, later in life when his taste may get corrupted, he may choose to drink things that may be harmful to him.

Ibn al Qayyim devoted a whole chapter on *fitra* in *Shifa al- 'alil* and copied a large amount of text from *Dar al-ta'arud*. He does not merely reproduce the Taymiyyan doctrine but refines it and deals with the difficulties that arise from the exegetical controversies of certain Quranic verses and Prophetic traditions. Expanding on Ibn Taymiyyah's analogy of milk, he integrates Islam into it saying:

“When milk and wine were presented to the Prophet in his nocturnal journey (*al-isra* '), he took the milk. Then he was told: 'You have taken the *fitra*. Had you taken the wine, your people would have strayed. Milk befits the body and benefits it like nothing else, just as the *fitra* befits the heart and benefits man like nothing else’⁶⁰

Ibn al Qayyim in his discussion brings forth the concept of God's justice emphasizing the element of human choice or *ikhtiyar* – a term that was not used by his teacher Ibn Taymiyyah.⁶¹ Ibn al Qayyim also concludes that human actions, while motivated by God are still within the domain of choice and not within the domain of compulsion.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid p. 295

⁶⁰ *Shifa* ' (1994), 619. The story of the wine and the milk (and in another version the water, the wine, and the milk) appears in the biography of the Prophet. Ibn Hisham (d. 218/833), *al-Sira al-nabawaiyya*, eds. Jamal Thabit et. al. (Cairo: Dar al-Hadith, 1416/1996), 2:6.

⁶¹ *Shifa* ' (1994), 422.

⁶² Ibid, 341.

Chapter 3: Classification of Non-Deterministic Views of Human *Fitra*

Different views emerged among the scholars who believed in some degree of human choice. There were three main views among scholars on the understanding of human *fitra*: those believing that human *fitra* is positive; those believing it is dual (both positive and negative); and those believing it is neutral. Scholars agreeing to one viewpoint within these categories also had some differences of opinion and did not believe exactly the same. The main decisive feature that puts scholars in one of these categories is their view on the extent to which the good and the evil are represented as either the innate human nature or as external influence from the environment.

3.1. *The neutral interpretation of Fitra:*

Neutralist scholars believe that human *fitra* is neither in the state of intrinsic *iman* nor in the state of intrinsic *kufr*. The child is born in a neutral state and the belief and unbelief are only manifested upon maturity when the man becomes liable (*mukallaf*) for decision-making.⁶³ This view emerged in the middle of the eighth century as a response to the predestination views of early scholars.⁶⁴ Libertarian scholars questioned the validity of the assumptions and arguments made by the predestination scholars who negated human free will emphasizing the complete Divine authority. As a response, libertarian scholars emphasized human freedom of choice to defend Divine justice maintaining that human choice is necessary to satisfy the concept of reward and punishment.⁶⁵ A Maliki scholar Ibn Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1070) responded to the

⁶³ Ibid, 198-9

⁶⁴ Wolfson (1976). *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, p. 602

⁶⁵ Ibid. pp. 602-624

deterministic views of Ibn Mubarak who believed that each individual is destined to either *Iman* or *kufr* through Divine decree and hence is born either in the state of *iman* or in the state of *kufr*.⁶⁶ Ibn Abd al-Barr, questioning his interpretation of *fitra* rejected the notion of immutable *iman* and *kufr* at birth. He supported his argument based on the following Quranic verse:

“It is God who brought you out of your mothers’ wombs knowing nothing and gave you hearing and sight and minds so that you might be thankful.” (16:78)⁶⁷

Ibn Abd al-Barr regarded the state of ‘knowing nothing’ as a state that is devoid of any good or evil. He argued that the stage of being responsible for our good and evil actions comes with maturity – the stage of responsibility (*taklif*). Hence, the child’s heart is wholesome without any inclinations. Ibn Abd al-Barr considers it similar to the reference made in the *fitra* hadith to the animal that is born intact and change is brought in them later by external action. He argues that similarly, Muslim parents’ teachings help their children to adopt Islam while non-Muslim parents’ children may accept the un-Islamic teachings of their parents at maturity.⁶⁸ Hence, accountability only starts at maturity and not for any innate state which may predispose them to any pattern of behavior. Ibn Abd al-Barr argues:

⁶⁶ Livnat Holtzman “Human Choice, Divine Guidance and the Fitra Tradition: The Use of Hadith in Theological Treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya.” *Ibn Taymiyya and his times* (2010), 174.

⁶⁷ The Quran (16:78), *An-Nahl*. Sahih International. وَاللّٰهُ اَخْرَجَكُمْ مِّنْ بُطُونِ اُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْاَبْصَارَ وَالْاَفْئِدَةَ ۚ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

⁶⁸ Al-‘Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, 199

“It is inconceivable that the newborns understand what unbelief and faith are because God has taken them out of the wombs of their mothers when they know absolutely nothing.”⁶⁹

There are several Quranic verses that put the burden of responsibility on the person for his actions. Some of these verses are as under:

“Every soul is held in pledge for its deeds” (74:38)⁷⁰

“and that each person will only have what they endeavored towards” (53:39)⁷¹

“Whoever chooses to be guided, it is only for their own good. And whoever chooses to stray, it is only to their own loss. No soul burdened with sin will bear the burden of another. And We would never punish [people] until We have sent a messenger [to warn them]” (17:15)⁷²

Ibn Abd al-Barr insists that these verses, especially the last verse confirm the importance of human choice as a pre-requisite of man’s good or bad fate. Therefore, he believes, every child is born in a state of ignorance (neutrality) and acquires knowledge from the external environment about good and evil to make conscious choices for accepting or rejecting the truth. Consequently, in Ibn Abd al-Barr’s view, external sources of guidance are absolutely necessary for guidance.

3.2. The positive interpretation of Fitra:

As far as the non-deterministic scholars, the majority of the classic Islamic scholars have a positive view of *fitra*. These include Ibn Taymiyyah⁷³ (d. 1328), Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350), Imam Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi (d. 1277), Abu

⁶⁹ *Dar’* (Beirut), 4:318; *Shifa’* (1994). Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s position is quoted by al-Qurtubi (d. 671/1273) in connection with verse 30:30 (*al-Jami’ li-ahkam al-Qur’an*, ed. Salim Mustafa al-Badri [Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1420/2000], 14:12).

⁷⁰ The Quran (74:30), *al-Muddathhir*. Sahih International. كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينٌ

⁷¹ The Quran (53:39), *al-Najm*. Sahih International. وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَى

⁷² The Quran (17:15), *al-Isra*. Sahih International. مَنْ أَهْتَدَى فَلِإِنَّمَا يَهْتَدِي لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ ضَلَّ فَلِإِنَّمَا يَضِلُّ عَلَيْهَا وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ

⁷³ *Dar’* (Beirut), 383, see also pp. 444-8.

Abdullah al-Qurtubi⁷⁴ (d. 1273), Shah Wali Allah Dehlawi (d. 1762), and many others including several modern scholars such as Mohammad Ali Sabuni, Ismail al-Faruqi, al-Attas, Sheikh Tantawi, Mohammad Asad, etc.⁷⁵

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, every child was born in the state of *fitra* while evil is an external agent of misguidance. Hence the normal human state is the state of innate goodness. He sees a natural relationship between primordial human nature and the value system or way of life in Islam. Consequently, man is naturally adapted to the religion of Islam which is a natural religion (*Din al-fitra*). Islam provides optimal conditions for the natural human qualities to prosper so that he can follow this religion from his heart and not feel that is externally imposed on him. Ibn Taymiyyah, responding to Ibn Barr's argument, explains that *fitra* is not a mere potential that needs to be awakened by an outside force but is in itself a source of awakening from within the individual. Islam is called '*Din Hanif*' in the Quran. Explaining the word *hanif*, Ibn Taymiyyah elaborated that *hanif* is not one who intellectually responds to various outside sources of guidance but is one who is already guided and seeks to establish it.⁷⁶ Referring to the hadith of *fitra*, Ibn Taymiyyah takes the position that converting to other non-Muslim belief systems from the influence of the environment reflects a change from a positive state to a negative state and not from a neutral to a negative state. Environmental factors can also influence the existing potential faith in a positive way by reinforcing it and aiding in its expression. This is seen when the potential faith that is already present in human *fitra* is reinforced through the guidance received through the external sources of Islam – *din al-*

⁷⁴ Muhammad al-Ansari al-Qurtubi. *al-Jami' al-Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Cairo: al-Maktah Arabiyyah. 1967), vol. XII. part 14. p. 27.

⁷⁵ Yasien. "The Interpretations of Fitrah.", 137-38.

⁷⁶ *Dar'* (Beirut), 383, see also pp. 444-8

fitrah – in the form of the Quranic revelation and the Prophetic Sunnah. In other words, human *fitra* resides in us as an innate receptive capacity for which *din al-Islam* serves as a perfect stimulus that fulfills its needs. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, if external misguidance remains absent from the environment, the natural human *fitra* will still involuntarily actualize and the good will prevail.⁷⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah rejects Ibn Abd al-Barr's position about the neutrality of the *fitra* and does not consider faith and unbelief to be equal alternatives. In addition to the *fitra* tradition and *fitra* verse, the following Quranic verse – the verse of ‘the primordial covenant’, is frequently cited as the basis of human beings having a positive *fitra*:

*“And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed, and made them testify touching themselves, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes, we testify’.” (7:172)*⁷⁸

This verse is argued as evidence that monotheistic faith is the primordial state of humankind. As discussed above, Ibn Hanbal in his two reports about *fitra* explains *fitra* firstly recognizes the existence of God, and secondly, this recognition leads to Islam.⁷⁹ This interpretation is also accepted by Ibn Taymiyyah. In emphasizing that the newborn is not born without true faith, he argues:

“Since if it were, then when it comes to the *fitra*, there would be no difference between knowing and denying, and all the differences between conversion to Judaism, Christianity or Islam would be merely circumstantial. According to this concept, it would have been more appropriate to say: his parents Islamize him, or Christianize him or convert him to Judaism or Mazdaism.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid p. 463-4

⁷⁸ The Quran (7:172), *al-A'raf*. Sahih International. وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنْفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ ۖ شَهِدْنَا ۚ أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ

⁷⁹ *Shifa'* (1994), 607–608; *Dar'* (Beirut), 4: 277–278.

⁸⁰ *Dar'* (Beirut), 4:319; *Shifa'* (1994), 639; Holtzman (2010), 174-5

Ibn Taymiyyah thus argues that the text of the *fitra* hadith would have been different if Ibn Abd al-Barr was correct in his deductions. In addition, Ibn Taymiyyah also considered the following *fitra* Quranic verse to support his view that *fitra* is positive and not neutral.

“...the *fitra* of God with which He created humankind. There is no changing God’s creation.” (30:30)⁸¹

He emphasized, that this verse also proves people are always created with *fitra* as Muslims.

Ibn al-Qayyim also had similar views of *fitra* being a positive human state. He does not regard *fitra* as mere knowledge of good and evil at birth but as an active, innate love and acknowledgment of God which reaffirms His Lordship.⁸² He did not agree with Ibn Abd al-Barr’s interpretation of the verse (16:78)⁸³ as mentioned above about the newborns being in the state of ‘knowing nothing’ and argued that this does not refer to the knowledge of God but likely refers to the knowledge of particulars of the religion.⁸⁴ Imam Nawawi (d. 676/1277), a Shafiite jurist who wrote the principal commentary on the *Sahih Muslim*, is also a proponent of a positive view of *fitra* and defines *fitra* as the unconfirmed state of Iman before the individual consciously acknowledges his belief. Hence, if a child were to die before reaching the age of discretion, he will be among the inmates of paradise, even if his parents were polytheists.⁸⁵ Abu Abdullah al-Qurtubi (d. 671/1273) also held a positive view of *fitra* deriving his argument from the example of

⁸¹ The Quran (30:30), *al-Rum*. Sahih International. قَطَرَتْ اللَّهُ أَلَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ.

⁸² Al-‘Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, 198

⁸³ The Quran (16:78), *An-Nahl*. Sahih International. وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ ۚ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

⁸⁴ Yasien (1995). *Islamic studies*, 137.

⁸⁵ I. M. Hanif, *Sahih Muslim bi Sharh al-Nawawi*, *Book of Qadr* (al Mutba’at al-Misriyah bi’l-Azhan, 1930), vol. XVI, p. 207

the animals born intact mentioned in the *fitra* hadith and said that similarly human child is born with the flawless capacity to accept Truth. The positive interpretation of *fitra* is the most widely accepted interpretation of *fitra* and bears a wide scholastic consensus by both classical as well as modern scholars.

3.3. *The dual interpretation of fitra:*

This interpretation of *fitra* was not held by classical scholars but developed mostly in the modern Muslim scholarly thought of the 20th century by scholars who were engaged in revolutionary trends or Islamic movements.⁸⁶ This modern view was not just a theoretical or intellectual concept but likely reflected the reality of contemporary geo-sociopolitical struggles going on in some Muslim nation-states.

Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) saw Islam as an operative force transforming society and actively dealing with modern world problems.⁸⁷ He saw the world divided in the dichotomy of evil and good where evil was seen in *nizam jahili* representing *shirk* and good was seen in *nizam Islami* representing *tawhid*. He saw a similar dualism in human *fitra* as well. Qutb regarded socialism, capitalism, and communism as the evil by-products of *nizam jahili* which should never be associated with Islamic ideals.⁸⁸ Between these two poles, man is supposed to do jihad against ignorance.⁸⁹ His dual interpretation of *fitra* is based on his interpretation of the following Quranic verses:

⁸⁶ Yasien. "The Interpretations of Fitrah", 131.

⁸⁷ Cantwell Smith. *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1977). p. 157

⁸⁸ Hamid Enayat. *Modern Islamic political thought: The response of the Shi 'i and Sunni Muslims to the twentieth century*. (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), 15

⁸⁹ Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Durban: Taj Company, n.d.), 46; Sayyid Qutb. *Ma'alim fi'l Tariq* (Beirut: Darul-Shuruq, 1980), 43.

“Your Lord said to the angels: “I am creating man from clay, when I have fashioned him and breathed of my Spirit (ruh) into him, kneel down and prostrate yourselves before him.” (15: 28-29)⁹⁰

“By the soul and its moulding, and inspiration with knowledge of wickedness and piety. Successful is the one who keeps it true, and ruined is the one who corrupts it.” (91:7-10)⁹¹

“And We have shown him the two paths [good and evil].” (90:10)⁹²

Qutb considers dual innate human nature because he is made of the spirit of God on one hand and the clay of the earth on the other creating two equal tendencies towards good and evil.⁹³ However, because of his conscious faculty, man is able to distinguish between good and evil and hence, becomes responsible for his actions. The good within the man is supported by the external good influences including the revelations and Prophet’s guidance while the evil attracts through external temptations and misguidance. Based on the following verse, man is, however, free to choose between these two paths.

“And We have shown him the right path, be he grateful or ungrateful.” (76:3)⁹⁴

Dr. Ali Shari’ati (d. 1977), an Iranian scholar also viewed the historical struggles as a clash of pairs of opposite forces. For Shari’ati, *tawhid* sees the world as an empire while *shirk* sees the world as a feudal system – a thesis and antithesis of monotheism and polytheism. He viewed this dualism evident in human history as a representation of the

⁹⁰ The Quran (15:28-29), *al-Hijr*. Sahih International. وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰئِكَةِ اِنِّیْ خَلِقُ بَشَرًا مِّنْ صَلْصَلٍ مِّنْ حَمَإٍ مَّسْنُوْنٍ
— فَاِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيْهِ مِنْ رُّوْحِیْ فَقَعُوْا لَهٗ سٰجِدِيْنَ

⁹¹ The Quran (91:7-10), *Al-shams*. Sahih International. وَنَفْسٍ وَّمَا - فَالْتَمَهَا فُجُوْرَهَا وَتَقْوٰیهَا - قَدْ اَفْلَحَ مَن زَكَّیْهَا - وَقَدْ خَابَ مَن دَسَّیْهَا
سَوَّیْهَا

⁹² The Quran (90:10), *al-Balad*. Sahih International. وَهَدَّیْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ

⁹³ Sayyid Qutb. *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (Darul-Sharuq. 1979), vol. VII, p. 3917.

⁹⁴ The Quran (76:3), *al-Insan*. Sahih International. اِنَّا هَدَّیْنَاهُ السَّبِيْلَ اِمَّا شٰكِرًا وَاِمَّا كٰفُوْرًا

dualism present in human nature.⁹⁵ Like Qutb, he also uses the symbol of clay of the earth and the spirit of God to support his dualistic theory of *fitra*. Clay, the lowliest material symbol is combined, in man, with the Spirit of God, the most exalted entity. Man is thus a bidimensional creature with a dual nature consisting of not only different but opposing forces, one inclined to descend to material, sedimentary mud, and the other inclined to ascend to the exalted Spirit of God. In his model, the other factors also included free will and trust offered to man by God. The trust burdens him with the responsibility to act as God's vicegerent on earth and use his free will appropriately.⁹⁶ While Sayyid Qutb's dualism of human nature is represented in society in the form of *nizam jahili* and *nizam Islami*, Ali Shari'ati's dualism reflects *tawhid* and *shirk*. Both scholars believe in human free will as a part of human nature and due to their socio-political circumstances, put forth the need for political struggle or *jihad al-asghar* as an integral part of their philosophy. On the contrary, the scholars with positive views of *fitra* mostly focused on the inner struggle between good and evil or *jihad al-akbar* and did not indulge much in terms of the struggle related to socio-political realities.

⁹⁵ Ali Shari'ati, *On the Sociology of Islam*, translated by II. Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1979), 29-31; See also "Ali Shari'ati, *Man and Islam*, translated by F. Marjani (Houston: Filinc, 1981), 6-14

⁹⁶ Shari'ati. *Sociology of Islam*, 73-77

Chapter 4: Scientific Understanding of Human Nature

Science only considers the results valid if they can be obtained in an observable and consistently reproducible fashion using scientific methodologies. Considering the fact that the development of the human mind, consciousness, morality, and conscience are very complex subjects and stretch across the edges of the domain of material science into the domain of metaphysical science, it must be understood that the currently available scientific tools have limited access to capture the reality of these.

4.1. Neuroscience and human Free will:

One of the major dichotomies that exist to date between science and the common human experience is that science has so far denied the presence of free will in human beings despite a strong human belief and observation that we are able to act in certain matters through our free will. This challenge was first faced through the experiments of the neuroscientist Benjamin Libet in the 1980s when he showed that our ‘awareness’ of decision-making does not precede the action but lags 550ms the muscle movement by the activity shown on the EEG.⁹⁷ The brain activity in the form of ‘readiness potential’ (RP) preceded conscious decision-making by about 150-250ms. He claimed that The brain “decides” to initiate or, at least, prepare to initiate [certain actions] before there is any reportable subjective awareness that such a decision has taken place.⁹⁸ He further claimed that If the “act now” process is initiated unconsciously, then conscious free will is not

⁹⁷ Benjamin Libet. "Unconscious cerebral initiative and the role of conscious will in voluntary action." *Behavioral and brain sciences* 8, no. 4 (1985), 529-539; Benjamin Libet. "Consciousness, Free Action and the Brain." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8: (2001), 59–65.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 536

doing it.⁹⁹ Since then, a number of scientists have done various Libet-type experiments using EEG, functional MRI (fMRI), depth electrodes, subdural grid electrodes, etc. but found similar results indicating that free will is an illusion.¹⁰⁰ Chun Siong Soon and his coauthors published a report on their fMRI study showing that based on the brain activity on fMRI that preceded the decision-making, they could predict with 60% accuracy several seconds before what decision they were going to make¹⁰¹, while Fried et al. could predict the decision 700ms before the awareness with over 80% accuracy.¹⁰² In another study, Soon et al. showed that the decision was first made unconsciously at the level of the frontopolar cortex of the brain and reached the awareness of decision-making later.¹⁰³ Mele analyzed these Libet-type experiments and showed some skepticism about certain conclusions.¹⁰⁴ Mele pointed out that all the Libet-type experiments mostly involve immediate or spontaneous kind of decision-making such as which limb to move or which button to press at a certain time. Since these decisions are not important and meaningful decisions that we normally come across in our normal lives where our free will plays a crucial role, it is hard to conclude the absence of free will based on these kinds of experiments. Laszlo Bernath also evaluated Libet-type experiments and concluded that although these experiments show some local determinism, they do not refute universal free will or the fact that the presence of free will might not be incompatible with local

⁹⁹ Libet (2001), 62.

¹⁰⁰ Alfred Mele, "Free will and neuroscience: decision times and the point of no return." *In Free will, causality, and neuroscience*, (Brill, 2019), 83-96.

¹⁰¹ Chung Siong Soon, et al. "Unconscious determinants of free decisions in the human brain." *Nature neuroscience* 11, no. 5 (2008), 543-545.

¹⁰² Itzhak Fried, et al. "Internally generated preactivation of single neurons in human medial frontal cortex predicts volition." *Neuron* 69, no. 3 (2011), 558.

¹⁰³ *ibid*, 545

¹⁰⁴ Mele, "Free will and neuroscience", 83-96

determinism demonstrated by these experiments.¹⁰⁵ Bernath concluded that Libet-type experiments are not able to refute all libertarian theories.

Although currently, science seems to incline more toward deterministic theories and has been unable to prove the presence of a human free will, yet as discussed above, the currently available scientific tools to evaluate mind functions may be too rudimentary considering the complexity of the mind and the mental processes.

4.2. Moral developments in infants and children:

Moral development is a very complex subject and in addition to depending upon an innate human nature, it is influenced by genetic as well as environmental factors. As children, we learn from our parents, teachers, close relations, friends, books, electronic media, etc., and are influenced by numerous other circumstantial factors that help us develop our learned morality. Several experiments have been done to see if a child has any moral judgment before developing reasoning faculties to analyze a moral or immoral behavior. Studies have shown that infants also have moral intuitions (intuition-based moral judgments) which they express much before the reason-based morality which is predominantly seen in adults.¹⁰⁶ These could be emotion-based¹⁰⁷ or non-emotion based.¹⁰⁸ In these studies, infants consistently preferred the puppets that were positive (shown to them in a previous video as helping others in tasks) over puppets that were

¹⁰⁵ Laszlo Bernath, "Why libet-style experiments cannot refute all forms of libertarianism." In *Free will, causality, and neuroscience* (Brill, 2019), 97-119

¹⁰⁶ Julia Van de Vondervoort, et al. "Evidence for intuitive morality: Preverbal infants make sociomoral evaluations." *Child Development Perspectives*, 10, no. 3 (2016), 143-148.

¹⁰⁷ Jonathan Haidt & Craig Joseph, "The moral mind: How 5 sets of innate moral intuitions guide the development of many culture-specific virtues, and perhaps even modules." Carruthers, S. Laurence, & S. Stich (Eds.), *The innate mind*. Vol. 3, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press.2008), 367–391.

¹⁰⁸ John Mikhail, "*Elements of moral cognition: Rawl's linguistic analogy and the cognitive science of moral and legal judgment.*" New York, NY: Cambridge University Press. 2011

negative (hindering others in their tasks). Eight months-old infants could judge the intentions as well and preferred the puppets who had intentions to help despite failing to help.¹⁰⁹ Vondervoort concludes that infants make evaluations of prosocial and antisocial behaviors in ways that are similar in many ways to adults, however, their judgments are intuition-based, unlike adults who show more reason-based moral judgments. Do these intuition-based moral judgments originate from an innate human *fitra* remains an open question.

Sommerville et al. evaluated several recent studies that were performed to evaluate the sense of fairness and justice in infants in their developing moral system.¹¹⁰ They concluded that empirical evidence suggests the development of a sense of fairness and justice can be seen in infants. When infants watched the distribution of resources to others with fair outcomes (2:2 distribution) and unfair outcomes (3:1 distribution), they judged fair distribution positively compared to unequal distribution of resources.¹¹¹ Studies showed that a sense of fairness develops between ages 10-15 months.¹¹² Studies also showed that the infants rewarded the fair actors but did not punish the unfair actors.

4.3. Cognitive science of religion:

¹⁰⁹ Fiery Cushman, "Crime and punishment: Distinguishing the roles of causal and intentional analyses in moral judgment." *Cognition*, 108, no. 2, (2008), 353–380; Kelly Hamlin, "Failed attempts to help and harm: Intention versus outcome in preverbal infants' social evaluations." *Cognition*, 128, no. 3 (2013), 451–474.

¹¹⁰ Jessica A. Sommerville, "The origins of infants' fairness concerns and links to prosocial behavior." *Current opinion in psychology*, 20, (2018), 117-121.

¹¹¹ Talee Ziv T, Jessica A. Sommerville, "Developmental Differences in Infants' Fairness Expectations From 6 to 15 Months of Age." *Child Development*. 88, no. 6 (2017), 1930-1951.

¹¹² Marek Meristo, Karin Strid, Luca Surian, "Preverbal Infants' Ability to Encode the Outcome of Distributive Actions." *Infancy*. 21, no. 3 (2016), 353–372.

Justin Barret reviewed various scientific studies related to the cognitive science of religion (CSR).¹¹³ In one study, Deborah Kelemen showed that teleological reasoning about the natural world exists in children who more frequently see ‘meaning and purpose’ in the natural world compared to adults – she called it ‘teleological bias’.¹¹⁴ The studies further showed that adults might have to ‘unlearn’ this bias through [scientific] education, however, under high cognitive demand conditions even science students may revert to finding unscientific ‘meaningfulness’ in the natural world. There is growing evidence that suggests that many religious ideas are largely intuitive. Additionally, there have been various research studies to see if religious ideas might have brought survival advantages in the evolving human communities. Some cognitive scientists have suggested that once religious ideas and practices emerged in human groups, they endowed these religious groups with survival and reproductive advantages over non-religious competitors through adaptiveness, genetic and cultural selection. In this context, studies by Pichon et al.¹¹⁵ and Saroglou et al.¹¹⁶ showed that priming of positive religion-related ideas was sufficient to produce prosocial behavioral change.

4.4. Genetics:

Researchers have also tried to find the relationship between spirituality or religiosity and human genetics and other neurochemical influences on the brain. Dean Hamer, in his book ‘God Gene’, mentioned a relationship that exists between the gene

¹¹³ Justin Barrett, “Cognitive science of religion: What is it and why is it?”. *Religion Compass*, 1, no. 6 (2007), 768–786.

¹¹⁴ Deborah Kelemen, “Are children ‘intuitive theists? Reasoning about purpose and design in nature.” *Psychological Science*, 15, no. 5 (2004), 295–301.

¹¹⁵ Isabelle Pichon, “Nonconscious influences of religion on prosociality: A priming study.” *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 37, no. 5 (2007), 1032–1045.

¹¹⁶ Vassilis Saroglou, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening: Religious priming activates submissive thoughts and behaviors.” *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 19 no. 3 (2009), 143–154

SLC18A2 (also called VMAT2) and increased spirituality in individuals.¹¹⁷ This gene encodes a vesicular monoamine transporter which controls the transport of the neurochemicals called monoamines that might have a fractional effect on spirituality. Certain psychoactive drugs such as psilocybin use the same chemical pathways that frequently induce intense experiences that are sometimes described as ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious’. Since then, several critical reviews have been published on this theory. Critics have viewed that these minor genetic influences in no way explain the widespread and strong faith system that exists across humanity.

4.5. Scientific debates about God-belief being part of innate human nature:

Justin Barret conducted several studies regarding innate human nature and belief in God and published several books and articles.¹¹⁸ A large international research project named ‘Cognition, Religion, and Theology Project’ involving 57 academics in 20 countries around the world, directed by Oxford University academics sampling studies from both religious and atheist societies concluded that humans are naturally predisposed to believe in gods and an afterlife. Evidence suggested that both theology and atheism are responses to a basic impulse “rooted” in human thought processes, regardless of cultural background. These findings published in the book by Barret ‘Born Believers’ (2012) have since been debated by critics and supporters of the theory. John Shook in his article critically analyzed Barret’s arguments and findings and pointed out flaws in the study and

¹¹⁷ Michael Goldman, “Book Review”. *NATURE GENETICS* VOLUME 36 | NUMBER 12 | DECEMBER 2004; Dean H. Hamer, *The God gene: How faith is hardwired into our genes*. Anchor. 2005.

¹¹⁸ Justin Barrett, *Why Would Anyone Believe in God?* Walnut Creek, Cal.: Altamira Press. 2004; Justin Barrett, *Born Believers: The Science of Children’s Religious Belief*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 2012; Justin Barrett and Ian M. Church, “Should CSR Give Atheists Epistemic Assurance? On Beer-Goggles, BFFs, and Skepticism Regarding Religious Beliefs.” *The Monist* 96, no. 3 (2013), 311-324.

conclusions drawn from it.¹¹⁹ He refuted any potential innate belief in God as a part of human nature arguing that evidence of religion in human beings only exists for about 5000 years and no archeological evidence of religion is seen in the life of human beings from 90,000 years to then. He argues that if belief in God was innate to human nature, then it should have been seen in phases of early humanity as well. He argued that religion likely evolved when human society became culturally advanced. Julie Exline et al. critically reviewed Shook's article calling Shook's arguments flawed.¹²⁰ Hence, the debate continues and the religious as well as the atheist groups keep using the results of various scientific studies in their favor to prove their own dogma.

¹¹⁹ John R. Shook, "Are People Born to be Believers, or Are Gods Born to be Believed?" *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 29, no. 4-5 (2017), 353-373.

¹²⁰ Julie Exline, "God belief as an innate aspect of human nature: A response to John Shook and questions for Justin Barrett." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 29, no. 4-5 (2017), 387-399.

Chapter 5: Metaphysical and Philosophical Understandings of ‘*Being*’ and Human Being

As discussed above, the human *fitra* debate remains unsettled in the Islamic scholarly as well as the scientific domains. Science with its limited available tools and applications continues to lag in reaching the interface of the physical and metaphysical domains and continues to deny any free will or innate metaphysical human nature. In scholarly theological debates, while the deterministic views endorsing God’s complete authority continue to have problems with justifying God’s attribute of justice, the alternative various theories accommodating free will continue to have some philosophical challenges explaining the complete enforcement of God’s will in the presence of a human free will. In the Sunni world, the most widely accepted theological viewpoints are Ibn Taymiyyah’s (and Ibn al-Qayyim’s) explanations differentiating God’s creative will from His religious will. Consequently, he describes God’s foreknowledge of human actions as non-coercive ‘knowledge’ rather than compulsive. By doing this he tries to move away from the traditional concept of determinism leaving space for human free will to be responsible for choosing actions and hence justified for reward and punishment for their actions. However, on further analysis, one may argue that a few philosophical issues remain outstanding in this theory. The first question is whether the free will that is given to human beings is a created thing or an uncreated divine tool. If human free will is considered created by God, then the problem of determinism may still linger somewhat in the same Way as one can talk about the determinism in the computers that are programmed. The other question that remains in Ibn Taymiyyah’s theory of God’s foreknowledge not being compulsive is that if we move one step back to a point in time before Adam was created and apply the same theory of God’s foreknowledge at that

point, we see that even before creating Adam, God knew from His foreknowledge that if he would create Adam, exactly who among us will make right choices and will go to *Jannah* and who among us will make wrong choices and will go to hell – but he still decided to create Adam and hence us (to be put in heaven or hell so to say). This again shows a kind of creative determinism – He ‘created’ certain people for heaven and certain people for hell. Another question that is frequently discussed in this scholarly controversy is whether or not there is anything in the core of human creation (soul/spirit/heart/intellect) which is of divine nature. The scholars of theology only concentrated on the questions dealing with the will of God and attempted to defend the Islamic faith by answering questions related to God’s authority, knowledge, and His will. The ontological issues about the reality of existence were not discussed by the scholars of *kalam (mutakalimun)* but rather intrigued the Islamic philosophers and mystics. In the following discussion, we will try to discuss some metaphysical concepts that have been presented in Islamic philosophy and mysticism.

Several early Muslim thinkers who were exposed to Greek, Persian, and Hindu philosophy, reviewed those concepts through an Islamic lens. Several new dimensions in Islamic thought came into existence that not only included philosophical dimensions but also spiritual or mystic dimensions. This diverse philosophical knowledge acquired by Muslim scholars was analyzed through the foundational knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah and the intrinsic Islamic spiritual experiences, which led to the establishment of a wide range of schools of thought in the Islamic lands that varied from relatively philosophical to relatively Sufi thought including everything in between. Several prominent thinkers made efforts to establish theories about ontological realities through

the lens of foundational Islamic knowledge of the Quran and Prophetic traditions. While figures like Abu Yaqub al-Kindi (d. 837 CE), Abu Nasr al-Farabi (d. 950 CE), Ibn Sina (d. 1037 CE), Ibn Rushd (d. 1198 CE), mostly Islamicized the Greek peripatetic philosophy in their works and are considered to be on the philosophical side of the spectrum (experts of discursive philosophy or *hikmat al-bahthiyya*)¹²¹, others like al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi stood more on the mystical/Sufi side of the spectrum (sapiential or gnostic knowledge or *hikmat al-dhawqiyya*)¹²². Other thinkers like Nasir al-Din Tusi, Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, and Sadar al-Din Shirazi tried to incorporate theology, philosophy, and mysticism together to create a unified doctrine of ‘being and existence’.¹²³

The traditional orthodox Islamic scholars and theologians did not indulge and rather avoided ontological discussions about the origin of existence and the Supreme Being. Al-Kindi was the first major Islamic philosopher to bring these ontological discussions about the Supreme Being and its hierarchical relationship with the world of existence. Al-Kindi discussed these Greek peripatetic philosophical concepts from an Islamic perspective in his book *fi l falsafat al-‘ula*.¹²⁴ Subsequently, Farabi tried to reconcile the thoughts of the two Greek philosophers – Plato and Aristotle and added his own thoughts from the Islamic perspective.¹²⁵ He synthesized philosophy and Islam in his treatise *fusus al-hikmah* (Bezels of Wisdom) in which he described the scheme of

¹²¹ Syed Hossein Nasr. *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present. Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy: Philosophical Issues*. (State University New York Press. 2006), 99

¹²² Ibid, 99

¹²³ Ibid, 100

¹²⁴ Ibid. *Islamic Philosophy in History*, 109

¹²⁵ Ibid, 110

emanation (*fayd*) where ten intellects emanated from the first intellect.¹²⁶ Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd significantly expanded on the thoughts of previous philosophers and consolidated the Islamic Peripatetic (*Masha'i*) schools of philosophy which later became known as Avicennism and Averroism in the West.

Different scholars have discussed *wujud* (Being), *mahiyyah* (quiddity or essence), and their relationship to *al-Dhat al-Ilahiyyah* (the Divine Essence) which is considered Beyond-Being and is the Absolute beyond any limitations.¹²⁷ The Being – the first ontological Principle – the Creator, is the first expression of the above-Being and all existence oozes or radiates from the Being creating the chain or levels of existence (*maratib al-wujud*). The manifest world is a unity of *wujud* and *mahiyyah*. The detailed discussion of *wujud* and *mahiyyah* is beyond the scope of this article but scholars have differed on the issue of primacy between *wujud* and *mahiyyah*. While God is the only being that is the Necessary Being (*wajib al-wujud*), everything else is contingent upon Him or possible beings (*mumkin al-wujud*) and there is a poverty of existence in the whole creation.¹²⁸ Different thinkers had outlined their doctrines with some variations of the above concepts. Ibn Arabi formulated the famous theory of the unity of existence or *wahdat al-wujud* with a hierarchical existence of various worlds of existence above the manifest world.¹²⁹ His theory came under severe criticism from religious orthodoxy. Similarly, Suhrawardi formulated the doctrine of illumination or *Ishraq* where God is the only source of light that encompasses and fills the whole universe.¹³⁰ All the existence is

¹²⁶ Ibid, 110

¹²⁷ Ibid. *The Question of Existence and Quiddity and Ontology*, 63-73

¹²⁸ Ibid, 66

¹²⁹ Ibid, 75-76

¹³⁰ Ibid, 74-80

various types and grades of divine light. Sadr al-Din Shirazi (Mulla Sadra) from the school of Isfahan further refined the doctrine of the ‘Transcendent theosophy’ (*hikmat al-muta’aliyyah*) where he talks about the ‘Unity, Gradation (of existence), and Principality of *wujud*’ (*wahdah*, *tashkik*, and *isalat al-wujud*).¹³¹ In his doctrine, he harmonized the philosophical aspects of the ontological realities with the experiential knowledge that is obtained directly through intuition. Earlier, Sufi scholars like al-Ghazali, Ibn Sab’in, and Ibn Arabi had formulated the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* which became the dominant doctrine in Sufism in which knowledge is obtained through ‘presence’ called presential knowledge (*Ilm hudhuri*) and divine unveiling (*kashf*).¹³² There are various interpretations of *wahdat al-wujud*. While according to the gnostic school of Ibn Arabi, only God has *wujud* and nothing else has *wujud*, the Mulla Sadra believes that God (*wajib al-wujud*) through effusion, gives *wujud* to every *mahiyyah* like the rays of the Sun.¹³³ While Tusi, Ibn Sina, and Mulla Sadra were proponents of the principality of *wujud*, others like Mir Damad and Suhrawardi were from the school that believed in the principality of the *mahiyyah*.¹³⁴ Most of these philosophical and Sufi interpretations believe in the *wujud* of one Absolute Reality and all other perceived realities are nothing in themselves but appear to exist only because they are theophanies (*tajalli*) of the single Reality. In the spiritual journey of experiencing the *wujud*, man can experience that all other realities including himself are nothing in themselves but only reflective images of the Absolute, and by realizing this negation of all other existents, he is able to experience the only *wujud* that is there. In this stage of ‘*Ilm hudhuri*’, the object and the subject of

¹³¹ Ibid, 74-80

¹³² Ibid, 75-76

¹³³ Ibid, 77-78

¹³⁴ Ibid, 79

the knowledge are the same. In the ascending hierarchy of knowledge from sensual to rational to intellectual to intuitive forms, intuitive knowledge is considered to be the most direct and definite kind of knowledge in Sufi schools and the school of Mulla Sadra.¹³⁵

The Ismaili philosophy also developed early on and focused on the esoteric aspects of the revelation/religion. The book '*Umm al-kitab*' (The archetypal book) is said to be the recorded conversations of the fifth Shiite Imam Mohammad al-Baqir (d. 733) and his disciples and reflects Shiite gnosis in its earlier forms.¹³⁶ This philosophy is said to be a combination of Neo-Pythagoreanism, Hermeticism, and Neo-Platonism. A more systematic formulation of this philosophy was elaborated a couple of centuries later by figures like al-Sajistani, al-Kirmani, and Nasir Khusraw (the author of the opus *Jami' al-hikmatayn* – The Sum of Two Wisdoms). The Ismaili philosophy is based on the emanation of intellects in which the Supreme Principle is not the 'being' as in Ibn Sina's philosophy but is the supra-being or the Originator (*al-Mubdi*). The first being is the 'First Originated' (*al-mubda' al-awwal*) and is the word of God (*kalam Allah*) – the first intellect.¹³⁷ From this emanates the hierarchy of beings. The creation stretches from God's creative word '*kun*' in the 'World of Origination' ('*alam al-ibda*') down to the 'World of Divine Command' ('*alam al-amr*') to the 'World of Creation' ('*alam al-khalq*').¹³⁸ In Ismaili philosophy, the third intellect is the 'Celestial Adam' (*al-Adam al-ruhani*) who is the archetype of humanity, who fell from his spiritual (*ruhani*) position to

¹³⁵ Ibid. *Epistemological questions*, 103

¹³⁶ Ibid. *Islamic philosophy in History*, 111

¹³⁷ Ibid, 148

¹³⁸ Ibid, 148

the 10th intellect.¹³⁹ The celestial Adam must now redeem himself with the help of seven intellects to regain his original position.

¹³⁹ Ibid, 149

Conclusions

The understanding of primordial human nature or *fitra* varies from one school of thought to the other. Various scholarly views exist not only among theologians but also among various philosophical and Sufi schools of thought in the Sunni as well as the Shiite world. While the hardcore deterministic view of the few generations after the Prophet (*salaf*) was more in favor of a human nature that had been ordained by the Almighty to do good or bad actions and hence attain their fate in paradise or hell according to the will of God, an early objection to this concept was raised by the Mu'tazilites. This dilemma of determinism versus free will was mostly settled in the Sunni Ash'arite world by Ibn Taymiyyah who reinterpreted the concept and the related material from the Quran and hadith and rejected the understanding of the *salaf* as well as the earlier Acquisition (*kasb*) theory of the Ash'arites. Although, his explanation of replacing God's deterministic (coercive) will with God's non-coercive foreknowledge made it more acceptable to most of the Sunni world due to its ability to reconcile God's authority and God's justice, a few philosophical issues may still exist in this theory as described above. Determinism still prevails in the realms of the scientific world where experiments with limited tools so far have failed to establish the existence of the human free will. Scientists also keep trying to explore and explain human nature based on genetic makeup, neuronal networks, developmental and social sciences, etc. However, the human mind, consciousness, human morality, and conscience are very complex and deep-rooted matters and exist at the borders of the physical and metaphysical domains and hence, inaccessible to scientific tools.

Deterministic thought has also been found in statements of certain Sufis as well. Generally speaking, Sufis are reluctant to reveal their knowledge about the solution to the puzzle of predetermination and free will (*al-qada wa al-qadr*). It is part of the completeness of a Sufi's spiritual courtesy (*adab*) that he should refrain from disclosing this secret. Several Sufis such as Abdul Qadir Jilani, al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, and al-Qunawi have indicated in their writings of having an insight into this puzzle after they were able to penetrate through the issue of destiny. While theologians and philosophers try to resolve the issue through discursive arguments, Sufis claim to have found the solution through presential knowledge (*Ilm Hudhuri*). Generally, Sufi masters tie this issue with God's oneness and complete reliance. (*tawhid and tawakkul*). Al-Ghazali puts it this way:

“A mystery which puzzles the majority, and those who are granted insight into it are prevented from revealing it. One may conclude that good and evil have been decided, and what has been decreed is bound to happen as it has been wished [by the Divine]. There is no objection to His judgment or obstacle to His Decree (*qada*) and Command.”¹⁴⁰

This deep faith in *tawakkul* may suggest determinism, however, Al-Ghazali does not accept blind determinacy, which would nullify reward and punishment but bases *tawakkul* on having absolute confidence in the Divine ‘Agent’ (*Wakil*). Through this, the Sufi sees that there could be no more beautifully created universe than that which exists. Al-Ghazali was not purely deterministic but believed in God's justice for human actions. Among the Sufis, the first one to speak of the possibility of revealing this secret is the great Sufi Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166), who said:

¹⁴⁰ Muhammad al-Ghazali. *Ihya' 'ulum al-din*, vol. 4, Eng. Transl. Fazl-ul-Karim 1993 (Darul Isha'at.), 200.

When the saints (*awliya'*) reached destiny they all found it to be a solid wall, except me: a window opened in it for me, and I entered through it, so that I mastered the destinies of God (*haqq*) through God.¹⁴¹

Subsequently, Ibn Arabi claimed that he entered the secrets of destiny through a 'wide door' in the city of Konya¹⁴² where subsequently, his student al-Qunawi was also revealed with secrets of destiny.¹⁴³ Although, some writings and poetry of Ibn Arabi suggest he believed in determinism, other writings in his book *Fusus al-Hikam* may suggest differently. In Ibn 'Arabi's opinion, the solution is to accept that there is no solution or what he calls 'no way-out' (*'adam al-takhalluṣ*). He prefers to adopt the idea of 'participation' (*ishtirak*) in the act by both God and human beings.¹⁴⁴

Most Sunni theologians have discretely separated the Creator from the creation and kept God as a transcendent entity and not a part of human beings or other creations. This leads to the belief that human beings have no divine component as an integral part of their nature but are just separate created beings who are made to worship the Creator. On the other hand, most Islamic philosophers believe in the idea that there is only one Essence which is the Supreme Being or the 'Being' which is the only true reality that exists. All other realities including the human being have no independent existence but are part of the hierarchal existence that oozes or radiates from the essence of the Being. Various concepts have been formulated by Islamic philosophers. Scholars such as al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd mostly Islamicized the peripatetic (*Mashai*) philosophy. Others like Suhrawardi synthesized pure illuminative (*Ishraqi*) philosophy.

¹⁴¹ This quote is from Salah al-Din al-Tijani, *Zubdat al-Futuḥat al-Makkiyya* (Cairo, 2006), 159.

¹⁴² Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi. *Futuḥat al-Makkiyya*. Vol III, 112 and 115.

¹⁴³ Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi. *Al-Nafaḥat al-Ilahiyya*, ed. M. Khwajawi (Tehran, 1413), 208–9.

¹⁴⁴ Ibn Arabi. *Al-Futuḥat al-Makkiyya*. Vol III, 211–12.

Mulla Sadra combined peripatetic, illuminative, and Sufi thoughts to synthesize his doctrine of transcendent theosophy (*hikmat al-muta'aliyah*). According to most of these philosophies, human beings in the lower world are only an extension or reflection of a purer form of the intellect/spirit/light that exists at the upper levels of hierarchal existence to which it is not only interconnected but is also affected by the interactions that happen at higher levels. It is difficult to exactly define primordial human nature under these concepts because human existence only has a virtual nature and is a reflective existence that is only a reflection of the Supreme Being. Since all these concepts mostly deny the true reality of any existence other than God, all the other creation possesses a kind of 'Divine Theophany' (*tajalli*), or light – hence may be considered godly. The Quranic verses regarding the creation of human beings or Adam do talk about God blowing His 'Soul' *ruh* into human beings –

*“When I have formed him and breathed into him of My spirit,
fall down prostrating before him.” (15:29) ¹⁴⁵*

Some scholars have taken it to literally mean that something of divine nature was instilled into human beings while others have interpreted the term 'My spirit' in this verse to mean 'from my domain' rather than from my essence. ¹⁴⁶

The Sufi thought is based on the sapiential or presential knowledge obtained through tasting hence, called 'Presential Knowledge' (*hikmah dhawqiyyah* or *Ilm huduri*). Ibn Arabi, the scholar of gnosis, formulated the doctrine of 'Unity of Existence' (*wahdat al-wujud*) with a premise not very different from the Islamic philosophers and insisted on

¹⁴⁵ The Quran (15:29). *al-Hijr*. Sahih International. فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

¹⁴⁶ Similar to if someone says, 'my book', 'my pen', 'my clothes' similarly 'my *ruh*'. كمثلي كتابي، قلمي، لباسي فمثله روعي

the transcendent unity of being. He also negated any existence to be real other than God whose ‘Divine Theophany’ (*tajalli*) emanates from His Being and fills the whole universe passing through different hierarchies of existence. The inner journey of many Sufis led them to experience the Divine after shedding the covering of the superfluous human instincts and ego through a process called ‘annihilation’ (*fana*). To Sufis, the potential for a divine experience lies at the core of the heart of every human being and is an integral part of human nature. This experience can be accessible to anyone who strives in this inner journey. Al-Ghazali talks about the human heart (which is sometimes also called *ruh*) in detail but avoids the discussion of its true nature due to Shariah restrictions which many other Sufis and theologians also avoided based on the interpretation of the following Quranic verse –

“And they ask you about the Spirit. Say, The Spirit is of the Command of my Lord; and in no way have you been brought of knowledge except a little.” (17:85)¹⁴⁷

Al-Ghazali believes the heart is from the superior (angelic) world (*al-alam al-amr*) that is only passing through this world (*al-alam al-khalq*) to achieve the purpose for which the heart is created – i.e., to attain God’s knowledge (*ma‘rifah*).¹⁴⁸ The heart is the primary reality of a human being while the rest of the faculties are only provided as tools of this lower world to help the heart achieve its purpose and return to the Creator.¹⁴⁹ Al-Ghazali also believes that within the primordial nature of the heart, it has a natural affinity with God and yearns to know Him.¹⁵⁰ The heart reaches its happiness (*sa‘adah*) through

¹⁴⁷ The Quran. (17:85), *al-Isra*. Sahih International. وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

¹⁴⁸ Mohammad al-Ghazali. *Kimiya e Sa‘adat*. Urdu Transl. ‘*Aksir e Hidayat*’ (translation by Fakhruddin Ahmad Siddiqi). Published by Dar al-Isha‘at, Karachi. (1979), 6-7

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 6-7

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 17

having a complete *ma‘rifah* of God. However, according to al-Ghazali, this *ma‘rifah* can only be achieved through intuitive knowledge that will come after its cleansing and practicing a good character (*khulq*).¹⁵¹ Al-Ghazali does not believe that intellectual knowledge is necessary for gnosis but rather believes that it interferes with achieving gnosis.¹⁵² He believes once the heart is clean and pure, the divine light will automatically shine in it, and the knowledge of God and everything else will pour into it through ‘*Ilm ladunni*’ (the knowledge from Me – a special kind of direct intuitive knowledge instilled by God).¹⁵³ For him, the only way to know God is through knowing yourself which will unveil the complete knowledge and mysteries of life, death, and the hereafter.¹⁵⁴

Without going into a further debate about whether primordial human nature consists of something that is of divine nature or not, the overwhelming evidence from the Quran and Hadith suggests there is at least some presential knowledge of God that had been instilled in the core of human *fitra*. The Quranic verse of ‘the primordial covenant’ is a clear indication of the presence of that knowledge in every human being –

“And [remember] when your Lord brought forth from the loins of the children of Adam their descendants and had them testify regarding themselves. [Allah asked] “Am I not your Lord?” They replied, “Yes, You are! We testify.” [He cautioned] “Now you have no right to say on Judgment Day, We were not aware of this.” (7:72) ¹⁵⁵

One can assume from it that this knowledge likely creates an inclination in human *fitra* to gravitate toward God and do good actions which can be assumed to be the natural

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 15

¹⁵² Ibid, 15

¹⁵³ Ibid, 14; The Quran (18:65), *al-Kahf*. “There they found a servant of Ours, to whom We had granted mercy from Us and enlightened with knowledge of Our Own.” فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِّنْ عِبَادِنَا ءَاتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً مِّنْ عِزِّنَا وَعِلْمًا مِّنْ لَّدُنَّا عِلْمًا

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 38

¹⁵⁵ The Quran (7:72), *al-A‘raf*. Sahih International. وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِن بَنِي ءَادَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا أَن تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَٰذَا غَافِلِينَ

tendency of *fitra*. Most scholars view the *fitra* hadith and *fitra* verse in conjunction with the verse of the primordial covenant to establish a positive view of human *fitra* – an advantageous position for human beings with a higher inclination to gravitate toward God. This advantageous natural predisposition bestowed to human beings is also in alignment with God’s attribute of mercy as highlighted in many verses and hadiths –

“Say peace be upon you. Your Lord has inscribed for Himself (the rule of) mercy” (6:54) ¹⁵⁶

“And My Mercy embraces all things” (7:156) ¹⁵⁷

“Verily, My Mercy prevailed over My Wrath.” (Bukhari and Muslim) ¹⁵⁸

Additionally, the *fitra* verse below along with the hadith of human creation strongly indicates goodness being part of primordial human nature –

“So be steadfast in faith in all uprightness [O Prophet]—the natural Way of Allah which He has instilled in [all] people. Let there be no change in this creation of Allah” (30:30) ¹⁵⁹

“Verily Allah has created Adam in his image” (Sahih Muslim) ¹⁶⁰

This position is also substantiated by the historical evidence from human history where we see an overwhelming part of the world’s population has some kind of belief in a superior power even though man’s egoistic and animalistic desires want to defy any such belief that tends to put social restrictions on him. We see however, that despite a natural tendency to believe in God and do good, man is trapped struggling in the dichotomy between good and evil trying to spiritually ascend towards the Divine – the destiny of the

¹⁵⁶ The Quran (6:54), *al-An`am*. Sahih International. قُلْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ

¹⁵⁷ The Quran (7:156), *al-A`raf*. Sahih International. وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ

¹⁵⁸ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (#3194), *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (#2751).

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ لَمَّا قَضَى اللَّهُ الْخَلْقَ كَتَبَ فِي كِتَابِهِ فَهُوَ عِنْدَهُ فَوْقَ الْعَرْشِ إِنَّ رَحْمَتِي غَلَبَتْ غَضَبِي قَاقُمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ

¹⁵⁹ The Quran (30:30), *Al-Rum*. Sahih International. ان الله خلق آدم على صورته

¹⁶⁰ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (#6227), *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (#2841). Narrated by Abu Hurayrah.

soul/spirit/heart, while pulled down toward the clay or the material world due to the animalistic part in its earthly human form. This struggle and its human experience are priceless because, in principle, the struggles lead to accelerated learning, growth, and development. This is true not only in the material world but also in the spiritual world. Hence, after the end of this struggle, one can be rightfully hopeful that God will meet with His creation with great mercy as mentioned in a hadith –

“Verily, there are one hundred (parts of) mercy for Allah, and it is one part of this mercy by virtue of which there is a mutual love between the people and ninety-nine reserved for the Day of Resurrection.”¹⁶¹

While currently, science keeps struggling in the domain of the physical world trying to find answers about the truths that are deeply buried in human nature and extend beyond the physical into the metaphysical realms, the revelation helps us understand the metaphysical truths that control the physical realm. The Quranic verses and the Prophetic traditions regarding human nature and its relationship to the Divine Being have helped theologians, philosophers, and Sufis to formulate various doctrines that explain to some degree, the reality of the human being, his *fitra*, and his relationship to the God in the grand scheme of existence.

¹⁶¹ *Sahih Muslim. Book 37, (# 6632):* Reported by Salman Farisi and Abu Hurayrah

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